



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the High Commissioner for National Minorities

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 9, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to see High Commissioner Ekeus back in the Permanent Council today. We welcome the High Commissioner's report and we support the important work done by him and his office.

The protection of national minorities remains a key element in our comprehensive approach to security in the OSCE region. In Copenhagen in 1990 we reaffirmed that "respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, as part of universally recognized human rights, is an essential factor for peace, justice, stability and democracy in the participating states." The gravity and the truth of this statement still hold true today.

For the past ten years, the High Commissioner for National Minorities has played a crucial role in protecting the rights and freedoms of national minorities within the OSCE region. We are pleased that the scope and depth of the High Commissioner's work has expanded, as needed, to include dialogue with a broader range of governments and minority groups.

We welcome the High Commissioner's increased involvement in Central Asia and, in particular, in Turkmenistan. The situation in Turkmenistan for national minorities is of grave concern to the United States, and we appreciate the High Commissioner's attempts to increase dialogue with the Turkmen authorities.

We note the government of Turkmenistan's recent willingness to discuss issues involving national minorities, such as the forced resettlement of ethnic Uzbeks and other minorities and the effort to establish a national identity. But we are discouraged by the implementation of these policies and we are also discouraged that little meaningful action has been taken to curb human rights violations. In particular, we remain concerned that the Government of Turkmenistan continues to characterize these forced resettlements as voluntary relocation, despite evidence to the contrary.

We are also concerned about Turkmenistan's elimination of dual citizenship. The arbitrary implementation of this policy, coupled with the distorted establishment of a national identity and State language, has served to discriminate against ethnic Russians and others. In this respect, we strongly support vigorous and ongoing efforts by the High Commissioner in Turkmenistan and we urge the Turkmen authorities to cooperate fully.

The High Commissioner should also stay engaged in other parts of Central Asia as well, including Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where the full integration and involvement of national

minorities remain concerns.

In Georgia, the High Commissioner has played an important role in developing minority language programs and facilitating the integration of national minorities into Georgian society. We encourage the High Commissioner to continue to monitor closely the situation in the Autonomous Region of Ajaria and other potential areas of conflict.

The United States also supports the continued engagement of the High Commissioner in Southeast Europe. While there has been notable progress in Croatia, including the adoption of legislation to protect minorities there, the situation of the Serbs and other ethnic groups should continue to be monitored. The international community must ensure that all governments of the region follow through on their promises to protect minorities with immediate and concrete actions. The situation of ethnic minorities in Kosovo is still of concern, as is discrimination against Roma and Sinti throughout the region. We also urge the Montenegrin authorities to continue working with High Commissioner Ekeus and the OSCE Office in Podgorica to adopt and implement quickly a law on national minorities.

We support the High Commissioner's continuing engagement on the difficult situation faced by Meskhetian Turks in the Krasnodar region of Russia, and urge the government of the Russian Federation to continue to work with the High Commissioner to find durable solutions for the Meskhetian Turks.

We also welcome the High Commissioner's continued involvement in Latvia. Latvia is making good progress on social integration and we encourage further efforts toward that end.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, please allow me to reiterate our strong support for the work done by High Commissioner Ekeus and his excellent staff. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.